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A RURAL HIGH SCHOOL

L. B. HILL

Middlebourne, West Virginia

The rural phases of educational progress in West Virginia are now being emphasized more than all other phases put together. A recent law gave each board of education in each magisterial district the power to appoint a district supervisor. Last year there were nineteen district supervisors in West Virginia, and wherever the board exercised care in the selection of the supervisor, district supervision has been successful. The law also provides for the establishment of district high schools; a number of these schools have already been established in the state.

Probably the most significant single movement toward rural development is the establishment of a county high school. This school was established in Tyler County. The county has an area of three hundred square miles, and a population of eighteen thousand; it borders on the Ohio River but has only fourteen miles of river front. There is but one town of any size in the county; this is Sistersville, with a population of four thousand. It has its own high school. Middlebourne, with a population of seven hundred and fifty, is the county seat and is rather centrally located. It is also the seat of the county high school. The county has two other towns each with a four-room graded-school building, two others each with a two-room school building; in the country there are two schools with two teachers; all the other schools in the county are one-room schools.

The surface of the county is hilly, but the small valleys and hillsides are productive; it is well suited to pasturage and to raising small fruits. In 1890 oil was found, and since that time the oil and gas industry has flourished. This industry has had certain social effects. For some years the farmers ceased their activities and seemed to revel in the thought of getting rich. The increase in property valuation from 1889 to 1909 was over

six million dollars. In recent years the oil industry has declined rapidly, and the effect has been to turn the attention of the citizens toward making permanent improvements. To this end the representatives of the county secured a special act of the legislature which gave the citizens the right to vote upon the proposition to establish a county high school. The vote was taken November 6, 1906, and showed that a good majority of the citizens were in favor of establishing such a school.

According to the provisions of the act the presidents of the various district boards, six in number, became members of the county high school board; also the president of the board of the independent district of Sistersville became a member; likewise the county superintendent became president, *ex officio*, of the board. After looking about for some time the board bought five acres of ground for a building-site in the town of Middlebourne. The price paid was \$5,000: the sum of \$3,275 was paid by the citizens of the town by private subscription. On Monday, August 26, ground was broken for the building. At the date set for the beginning of school the building was not entirely finished; so the organization was made in the county courthouse. The school occupied these quarters for one month and then moved into its permanent home.

The brick, laid in red mortar, and the four large white Ionic columns, supporting a portico, give the building a massive appearance. It is 129 feet long by 78 feet wide, has nine classrooms, a library room, study hall, auditorium, gymnasium, office, woodshop, furnace rooms, and lavatories. The auditorium, with its elevated floor, wide stage, and dressing-rooms, furnishes ample provisions for lecture courses and entertainments. The stage is furnished with a grand piano, and the deep-paneled metal ceiling adds to the attractiveness of the room. On the first floor is a sanitary drinking-fountain; the water supply is from a large cistern. In the basement is a pressure tank which forces the water to all parts of the building. The building is heated by six gas furnaces, three in each end of the basement; by this means any one room may be heated without heating the others. The ventilating is by means of the fan system. Some

of the rooms are furnished with desks, others with tablet arm chairs. In this rural building are found most of the conveniences of the modern city high school.

On the day set for beginning the school, September 28, 1908, 42 pupils were enrolled. Of this number 24 were from the town and 18 from the country. Of those from the country most lived close enough to board at home; only 2 boarded in town. In March a special spring term was begun which was largely attended by country teachers and their pupils who were preparing to teach. This increased the total enrolment to 170 before the close of the first year. The second year began with an enrolment of 69; of these a much larger percentage are from the country than were those of the first year. Those who board in town are able to secure board and room at the rate of \$2.50 or \$3.00 a week. Some, who go home on Friday evening and return Monday morning, secure a still lower rate. From the beginning two courses were offered: an industrial course and a college preparatory course. The former differs from the latter in that it has German instead of Latin; it also has agriculture and manual training, and contemplates domestic science. Considerable freedom was allowed the pupil in choosing the course and also in substituting branches in one course for those in the other. It was interesting to note that a large majority of the pupils chose the college-preparatory course, and most of them steered clear of the subject of agriculture. It is still more significant to note that already there has been a marked change in sentiment; the industrial course has grown in popularity, and agriculture is now a much-favored subject. Manual training was introduced into the school as follows: Two boys were observed who were industrially inclined. These boys each had small shops and a number of tools at home. They were invited to bring their tools to the building, and a small room was set aside for a shop. Some lumber was procured out of which they made benches; during the first year they made a bookcase and a number of useful articles for the school. The boys soon observed that the room in which they were working was located immediately over one of the engines which runs the ventilating fans. They

therefore constructed a turning lathe, made a support for a jig saw, a bench for a rip saw, a frame for a grindstone, and by means of pulleys and shafting attached each of these to the engine. Other boys soon became interested, and by the time of the opening of school last fall a number of pupils were ready to elect manual training. The work is now under the direction of a teacher, and the pupils work at least six hours per week. The school furnishes the lumber, but the pupils furnish their own tools. This year in addition to their regular work they will construct some chemistry tables and cabinets, and make most of the tables and desks needed for science work. In this way an attempt is being made to correlate science and manual training.

A good lecture course is maintained by the school; this is liberally patronized by the pupils and townspeople. As yet, not many country people attend owing to the difficulty of transportation. Literary societies, baseball teams, and tennis clubs are well organized. In the spring the classes in agriculture will try their hand at school gardens. Also a corn contest for the entire county will be conducted under the direction of the Department of Agriculture, the object being to interest the farmers and their sons more intensely in agriculture, and indirectly to draw their attention toward the high school.

Sixteen units are necessary for graduation in each course. This year there will be a graduating class of sixteen, although this is only the second year of the school's existence. This is possible because the town school had been giving two years of high-school work previous to the organization of the county high school. In regard to the selection of teachers a liberal policy was inaugurated by the board, only college graduates being selected. At present there are three assistants to the principal besides a special teacher of music and drawing. Most of these have done considerable graduate work.

Before the school was organized it was thought necessary to educate public sentiment in favor of the high school. The principal secured lantern slides of high-school buildings, of high-school work, and made others showing the cost and value of a high-school education. He then made a tour of the county. He

found that the chief objections to the movement came from a misunderstanding of the meaning of a high school and from false reports concerning the cost of this particular building. However, the sentiment among the country people for a higher education was beyond what one might expect to find. A second tour was made just before the beginning of the second year, when it was found that public sentiment had much improved; that the people were beginning to find out what a high school really meant and were becoming its ardent supporters. The large number of pupils in attendance during the spring term, representing all parts of the county, took good reports to their homes; these reports helped much toward creating a favorable sentiment.

It is early in the history of the school to speak of the influence it will have upon the rural schools. But already certain results are evident. The special term last spring was "tacked on" for the benefit of those who had been teaching in the rural schools. Extra teachers were added, and the common-school branches, together with some of the first-year high-school subjects, were given. Many of those who attended are again teaching in the rural schools. It is found that these teachers have carried the high-school spirit into the remotest parts of the county, that they are instilling into the minds of the country boys and girls the idea of entering high school and completing the course of study; that many of them are now teaching the elements of agriculture, music, and drawing, who never would have attempted these subjects had it not been for their three months' training in the high school. Of course these teachers should have much more work in order to manage these subjects successfully; yet their enthusiasm insures us that they will take more work by and by.

The question naturally arises whether this is the proper type of school for rural communities. Our experience leads us to say that for some it is and for some it is not. A smaller unit, such as the magisterial district, is probably better than the county, provided such a unit can furnish means for supporting a good high school. It will bring the school closer to the homes of the boys and girls. But many districts are not able financially to

support high schools without an unreasonably high rate upon the taxable property, whereas with the county as the unit and each district contributing its share the financial problem is easily met. In Tyler County there are six magisterial districts, with a total property valuation of over sixteen million dollars. Thus this county can support a high school at a very reasonable rate of taxation. But no one district in the county could support a school of its own without a tax rate higher than the citizens are willing to pay. It is evident that some districts in some counties will be able to maintain schools of their own while others will not; this places the poor district at a decided disadvantage. Hence we believe that in most cases where the county is not too large it is best to have one good high school centrally located. This insures more money for the school, and as a result a larger and better teaching staff, greater variety in the course of study, and a wider association for the pupils.